

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**To:** [PAC Enquiries Mailbox](#)  
**Subject:** Russell Vale Colliery Underground Expansion Project  
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To the Planning Commission.

Please forgive any language that may seem hyperbolic in this submission. Language barely succeeds in expressing the seriousness of the situation we find ourselves in regarding water security at this moment in Australia's history, so it not possible to make a meaningful submission in language that is restrained.

While the royalties from mining are an important source of revenue for State governments, the long term risk to water supplies needs to be balanced very carefully against this short term income stream.

When long-wall miners move on from one tunnel to another, they remove the roof supports. Many tunnels then collapse. When the collapse occurs, this can cause fissures to open up all the way to the surface. This is highly relevant to this application. There are large moss bogs on top of the sandstone formations above the proposed extension. These moss bogs (sometimes referred to as peat forests) act like giant sponges, holding large quantities of water. These 'sponges' keep rivers and creeks flowing even during droughts. When cracks open up under these moss bogs, the water drains away, the mosses dry out and die. A system that has maintained water supplies for thousands of years is destroyed.

We live in a nation that is very sensitive to water supply issues. To risk damaging more of these systems needs to be taken into account, as the cost to the State to supply water to Sydney and Wollongong if we lose natural supplies will be many times greater than any royalties received. The Commission is therefore duty bound to take this into account, irrespective of any political pressure being brought to bear in favour of the mine extension.

If the Commission is in favour of the extension, then I respectfully suggest that a strict condition of the extension be that permanent roof supports be put in place sufficient to ensure that the tunnels will NOT collapse and create the profound damage to surface water supplies caused by fissuring. The size of bonds in place for mine rehabilitation is very rarely sufficient to make good damage done by mining and in this case that cost could become astronomical. If the argument is about economic cost and benefit, the potential for the cost of damage to the water supply simply must be a factor in your deliberations. To accept at face value any assertions of the mining company that no damage will be done would be ignore the age old legal dictum, *cui bono*: who stands to gain most from this. The removal of roof supports when the mining machinery moves to the next wall is effected to save money, because the miners see their primary duty as making maximum profits for themselves and their shareholders. In a capitalist model, this seems reasonable. However, they also have a duty not to damage the interests of the citizens of this State from whom they receive the licence in the name of the Crown. Therefore, requiring the mining company to spend some money on stabilising the tunnels after they have extracted the minerals they seek is also entirely reasonable. The company may counter this by saying that the costs of roof supports would make the extension economically unviable. That is an argument often mounted. However, please consider what they are actually implying when they say this: we are not prepared to protect against potential damage as this will impact our profits, but we are entirely happy for the State

(and this means the taxpayers of the State) to pay for the damage we may do, however much that may cost. Far too often, companies have walked away from their responsibilities for damage done, so one has to ask whether in this instance they deserve the benefit of the doubt. I would be happy to supply the details of many instances in which mining rehabilitation bonds have been inadequate and State governments have had to cover costs far exceeding the initial benefit of royalties. If there is doubt, then the Commission may surely act in the interests of the Citizens instead of favouring those of the mining company.

I have not written here about the loss of amenity when natural landscapes are damaged, but I hope the Commission will wisely take this into account.

It would be remiss of me not to mention climate change. The world's scientists agree that this is a real and very pressing issue. Politicians from all over the world, including our own PM, have spoken in Paris in the last few days about the real need to take meaningful action. The position is broadly agreed that the planet is warming and greenhouse gases released by human activity are responsible. No one with any credibility argues against this position any longer. It is also a known fact that Australia is especially vulnerable to increased drought as a result. While this issue may seem to be beyond the remit of the Commission, it would be irresponsible in the extreme not to take this into account. I was speaking to Ian Dunlop recently; Ian was on the Board of Shell and head of their coal division at one time. He now campaigns for us to get away from coal as soon as possible. He was speaking to senior people at BHP last month and told me that BHP are planning for a global temperature rise not of 1.5-2 degrees C (the supposed 'safe' limit) but 3-4 degrees C. This may not seem much but this is an average - the local impacts will be almost unimaginable. So, anything that may give rise to damage to our water supplies at this moment in history would be irrational.

Please, Commissioners, act with courage, decency and integrity. Consider all the factors and risks. Please ask yourselves the vital question: is a short-term gain in mining royalties sufficient to justify risking long term damage to water supplies in a drought-prone country? I respectfully submit that the cost-benefit analysis will reveal that unless the miners are required to stabilise the tunnels permanently this proposed extension will expose the State to unacceptable levels of risk.

Yours sincerely

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